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DHS admits mistakes in Ricky Holland case, announces reforms

By **JACK KRESNAK**
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

December 8, 2006

LANSING – While saying that state social services workers involved in the Ricky Holland case were deceived by his parents, Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow on Friday said state workers in two counties made mistakes that may have contributed to the former foster child's violent death.

"This case underscores the tough challenges we face every day working with troubled families and children at risk," Udow said. "It is difficult, heart-breaking work that is multiplied over and over again."

But she also said, "Agencies, police, educators, the courts, and everyone involved in the chain of protection needs to better coordinate the sharing of critical information," Udow said. "And clearly, DHS must do a better job of ensuring that foster parents and adoptive parents are suitable and will provide safe, supportive, stable homes every step of the way."

Saying this was the first time the state DHS had released confidential information related to the death of a child, Udow said that there were four Children's Protective Services (CPS) complaints regarding Ricky in Jackson County and five CPS complaints in Ingham County, all made after Ricky's adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, reported on July 2, 2005, that he had run away from their home near Williamston.

"Our review also showed, however, that some policies were not followed by individuals and in some cases we need to further strengthen our existing policies," Udow said.

Tim Holland, 37, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and Lisa Holland, 33, was convicted of first-degree murder in Ricky's death. He is serving up to 60 years in prison; she was sentenced to life without parole. Tim Holland admitted concealing Ricky's body in a swampy area and testified against his wife, saying she admitted striking Ricky with a small hammer.

Udow said that of the four Jackson County CPS complaints, one was not made against Tim or Lisa Holland, two were deemed not credible and one was investigated, but not as fully as it should have been.

The five CPS referrals in Ingham County were investigated promptly but not as thoroughly as they should have been, Udow said.

Some 23 DHS employees in Jackson and Ingham Counties were involved in the Ricky Holland case, Udow said.

Of those, 10 are under investigation for possible disciplinary action and all but one of those already moved to positions that have no authority to make decisions about children, Udow said. One supervisor remains in place but is under close monitoring by administrators, Udow said.

Another three workers would have faced disciplinary investigations, but Udow said two of them left the department and one – a Jackson County adoption worker who did the initial assessment of the Holland home – died.

Udow said the DHS already has instituted significant reforms to better protect children, including:

- Improved screening tools for potential foster/adoptive parents, including possibly using psychological evaluations.
- Doing criminal background checks on every licensed foster parent monthly, instead of yearly.
- Requiring that any reported licensing violation be investigated by workers in a different county than the one that licensed the home.
- Improved computerized reporting programs that will not allow foster care or CPS workers to finish reports without completing sections such as the place where a child was seen by the worker.
- Made it easier for so-called "mandated reporters" – professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers and therapists – to report suspected child abuse and neglect and to make updated reports through a toll-free hotline.

"Through the course of these difficult months, I have said repeatedly that protecting and nurturing children is a shared responsibility that begins with responsible parenting," Udow said. "We cannot do this job alone. Relatives, friends, neighbors, everyone needs to be on the watch and call if they suspect neglect or abuse."

Udow's news conference was held after the state Office of the Children's Ombudman released a report saying DHS workers who handled the

Holland case did not fully comply with state laws, rules and policies designed to protect children from abuse.

The report concluded that the DHS offices in Jackson and Ingham counties failed to ensure Ricky's safety from the start of his placement with licensed foster parents Tim and Lisa Holland in October 2000.

The Hollands first claimed that Ricky, whom they adopted in 2004, had run away from their home near Williamston on July 2, 2005.

The runaway story was determined by police to be a ruse to cover up a pattern of strange and cruel abuse of the boy, who was 7 at the time of his death, in the Holland home. On Jan. 27, Tim Holland led police to a swampy area south of Dansville where he had left the corpse to rot more than six months earlier.

The personal and systemic failures disclosed Friday by Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin were found across five DHS units involved in Ricky's case — Children's Protective Services (CPS), foster care, licensing, adoption and overall DHS systems.

Two versions of the ombudsman's report actually were released.

The first, a 21-page report that is available to the public, was sent to the news media via e-mail about 9:30 a.m. Friday.

That report contains only recommendations the Ombudsman's Office made to the state DHS. The report does not include any information deemed confidential under the state's Child Protection Law and some things, including the names of Ricky's siblings and their dates of birth, were redacted on the report.

The second version of the report is 43 pages and contains both findings and recommendations from the Ricky Holland investigation. That report, which was given only to state legislators who made formal requests to investigate Ricky's case, is more heavily redacted to protect the confidentiality of information under the Child Protection Law, the state Adoption Code, and federal and state privacy laws regarding medical or mental health information.

State Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, shared his report with findings and recommendations with the news media. Law said he plans to request that the ombudsman appear at a closed session of his special committee, which has been investigating the Holland case, to discuss details of the case that are not to be released to the public.

With the redactions, it is difficult to understand exactly what happened, although those familiar with details of the complicated case can figure out many details.

The ombudsman's report found that a CPS investigator botched a referral from Ricky's therapist in February 2002 that Ricky's foster parents — Tim and Lisa Holland — were tying the boy up in bed at night.

The investigator failed to talk further with the therapist, who had a 7-month relationship with Ricky, and failed to conduct a scene investigation and discounted Ricky's statements based on Lisa Holland's denial, the report says.

The DHS agreed with much of that finding, but said the investigator did observe Ricky's room. But the DHS response said "additional investigative steps should have occurred when the child's disclosure was in direct conflict with the caretaker's denial."

The Ombudsman's Office made seven findings and recommendations regarding CPS actions, including that the Ingham County DHS mishandled reports that the Hollands were abusing Ricky's siblings after they reported him missing. The DHS disputes that child abuse investigators in Ingham County failed to protect the siblings, saying the case was complicated by the police investigation into Ricky's disappearance.

The report also found that Ricky's foster care worker in Jackson County failed to document visiting the boy in the Holland foster home for nearly two years, from Oct. 2, 2000, to Sept. 24, 2002 — a violation of state policy and rules.

The DHS agreed, although it said the foster care worker documented seeing Ricky 36 times, but did not note where she saw him.

That worker also failed to report any consideration of the bed-tying allegation by Ricky's therapist in February 2002; a fact also agreed to by DHS.

The foster care worker also failed to get approval from either of Ricky's biological parents for him to be placed on behavior-control medications, as required by DHS policy. The DHS agreed.

In all, there were seven findings and recommendations about Ricky's foster care, most of them agreed to by DHS.

Ricky's adoption workers also failed to properly assess Tim and Lisa Hollands' ability to care for multiple children with psychological problems, particularly Ricky who was evaluated by a psychologist and treated by a therapist and a psychiatrist while in the Holland home in Jackson.

The DHS agreed with the report's recommendation that foster care workers "make contact with each professional involved in a foster child's care to solicit the professional's observations regarding the children's caregivers."

The ombudsman's report found that DHS licensing workers failed to review relevant documents from CPS and foster care that could have indicated child maltreatment.

The DHS agreed with many of the licensing findings and the recommendations, including that it should develop a review of how the DHS assesses the ability of foster parents to care for children with mental and emotional problems.

Under systems, the Ombudsman's Office found that state policy offers no guidance to workers on how to assess "whether a caregiver can adequately meet the needs of all children in the home when considering the placement of subsequent children."

"What happened to Ricky was tragic," Ruffin said.

"The mission of the Office of Children's Ombudsman is to assure the safety and well-being of children in the child welfare system. I believe that with the continued cooperation of DHS and private agencies and with the help of the legislature the child welfare system will move closer to being better able to protect children."

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Ricky probe faults state workers

More follow-up might have saved him, report says

BY JACK KRESNAK
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

December 9, 2006

LANSING -- In a day of unprecedented disclosures of the flaws in Michigan's child protection system, three state reports released Friday outlined a costly series of lapses that contributed to the abuse and death of 7-year-old Ricky Holland.

Officials said the ultimate blame for Ricky's murder last year lies with his foster and adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, but the Office of the Children's Ombudsman and the state Department of Human Services each described the mistakes by as many as 10 DHS employees in Jackson and Ingham counties whose actions are under disciplinary investigation.

Of the three other employees whose actions were suspect, one died and two others resigned or retired, DHS Director Marianne Udow said during a public airing of the fallout from a case that riveted the state for more than a year.

Udow's report and another from Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin describe a botched February 2002 investigation of a referral from Ricky's therapist by a Children's Protective Services worker and a licensing worker assigned to the Jackson County DHS office that might have been a turning point in Ricky's short life.

The therapist, Susan Honeck of Catholic Social Services in Jackson, reported that Ricky had a mark on his wrist. He told her that his parents tied him up in bed at night and his father used handcuffs on him. When interviewed by investigators, Ricky said the mark might have been made by a leash he was holding with the family's dog.

But the ombudsman's report concluded, "the [CPS] worker did not observe Ricky's bedroom, his bed and the dog leash, among other details in the home that were relevant to evaluation the complaint allegation." The report also noted that investigators believed Lisa Holland's denials that she tied Ricky up.

The DHS disputes that, saying the workers did observe Ricky's room. But Udow said the investigation was not thorough.

"They focused on the cause of the mark of the wrist, but they did not focus on the conflicting stories about whether or not Ricky was in fact tied to the bed at night," Udow said of the workers who looked into the allegation.

"There should have been more investigation at that point, more collateral investigation, and not just Ricky and Lisa Holland. They trusted Lisa Holland's word on it."

Udow would not say whether that was the point where Ricky's life could have been saved.

"It was a case where there were so many different variables involved in many layers that I could not, say, think of just one thing," Udow said. Tim Holland pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in Ricky's death and Lisa Holland was convicted of first-degree murder by an Ingham County Circuit Court jury in October. The Hollands first claimed that Ricky, whom they adopted in 2004, had run away from their home near Williamston on July 2, 2005. Tim Holland later testified against his wife, telling a horrific tale of her ongoing abuse of Ricky, including a blow from a hammer near the end of his life. Tim Holland could serve as many as 60 years in prison; his wife received a life sentence without parole.

The state investigations identified many areas where the system that is supposed to protect children, but has been implicated in the deaths of three foster or adoptive children in the last 18 months, can be changed.



Ricky Holland, 7

Key findings of the report

The Office of the Children's Ombudsman found:

- Children's Protective Services workers in Jackson County did not thoroughly investigate Ricky Holland's statements to his therapist that his parents tied him to his bed at night. The CPS investigator chose to believe his mother's denials.
- A Jackson County Department of Human Services foster care worker apparently did not visit Ricky in the Holland foster home for nearly two years. The state DHS said the worker saw Ricky 36 times in many settings but did not document seeing him in the home, as required.
- The Jackson County DHS adoption worker pushed

"These are all multilayered tragedies, and I cannot tell you that even if we do everything right that we will prevent all tragedies from occurring," Udow said. "It is our commitment to do everything we can, that we do all we can, to protect our children."

Udow said her statements were the first time the DHS had ever publicly disclosed specific information about a CPS case.

The four-page DHS report highlighted reforms that Udow said began months ago.

The two Children's Ombudsman reports -- a 43-page account of its findings and recommendations that was sent to legislators and a 21-page report of recommendations that was released to the public -- offer a more detailed look at what policies were not followed.

But not everyone was satisfied with the findings and fixes that were announced.

State Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, who heads a special committee convened around the Holland case, said he was disturbed that no worker was fired. Of the 10 under investigation, nine have been transferred to jobs where they have no contact with children's cases and one is being monitored on the job.

"Where I got most upset is where they talked about the discipline of workers," Law said. "You have nine workers where it appears a child died on their watch and not one, not one is fired. They get shifted around. Where's the accountability? A child can die on your watch and the worst thing that can happen to you is you're going to have to go to another division?"

"That bothered me."

Udow said the lengthy criminal investigation into Ricky's death prevented the DHS from releasing information earlier to the public or sharing documents with attorneys representing the DHS employees. Any discipline can now begin under provisions of the union contract, she said.

Susan Lambiase, associate director of Children's Rights, a New York-based advocacy group that is suing Michigan in federal court over its child welfare system, said that until the state hires more workers to reduce caseloads, there probably won't be any real improvement.

"There are some core problems," Lambiase said. "You've got workers not doing what they're already mandated to do. You've got to get workers able to do these things by making their caseloads reasonable enough that they can actually go out and see their kids, they can actually do thorough investigations and do not rush to close cases."

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through the adoption of one of Ricky's siblings by Tim and Lisa Holland in July 2005, though the Hollands had reported that Ricky ran away that month.

- The DHS licensing worker for the Holland home failed to follow up on complaints on Ricky's care.

- CPS investigators in Ingham County failed to completely investigate complaints about Ricky and his siblings. The complaints were made after the Hollands reported Ricky's disappearance.

Key changes after the case

The Department of Human Services announced these steps to improve the safety of children in foster care:

- Doing monthly, instead of yearly, criminal background checks on foster parents.

- Creating better tools to screen foster and adoptive parents, possibly including psychological evaluations.

- Improving computerized reporting programs for workers to ensure complete reports.

- Making it easier for so-called mandated reporters -- professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers, police officers and therapists -- to report suspected maltreatment and provide follow-up through a toll-free hotline.

- Having DHS workers from a different county investigate licensing complaints.

- Requiring more training for supervisors and Children's Protective Services and foster care

workers, including specialized training by State Police.

- Setting new requirements for sharing information with licensing and foster care workers when CPS investigates complaints of abuse or neglect in a foster home.

Key findings

- Workers failed to fully investigate Ricky's tale of abuse.
- Foster care worker didn't visit him at home for nearly two years.
- The Hollands were allowed to adopt Ricky's sibling after he vanished.
- Licensing worker failed to check on complaints.

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December 9, 2006

State failed, Ricky died

Laws broken; officials vow to fix system

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

LANSING -- State officials vowed to reform Michigan's child welfare system Friday after acknowledging serious mistakes and ignoring signs of abuse leading to the murder of an adopted 7-year-old.

The Department of Human Services released its investigation into the July 2005 bludgeoning death of Ricky Holland that admitted child protection workers failed to adequately investigate complaints of his abuse and took shortcuts before placing three of his siblings with the Williamston couple who killed him.

"More should have been done," said Marianne Udow, director of the agency that cares for 18,000 foster care children. "We did not follow policy in every place that we should have."

Also Friday, Michigan Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin released a separate report into the case that found 36 errors by workers, including shoddy practices, faulty decisions, lack of compliance with department policies and violations of state law.

Both of Ricky's parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, were sent to prison this fall for killing the foster child with a tack hammer, then claiming he ran away from their Williamston home before they led investigators to his body in January.

The ombudsman's report revealed that state workers prepared a petition to terminate the Hollands' right to the four children who remained in their home following Ricky's disappearance in July 2005 but never submitted it to the court. Udow described the case as a tragedy and said 10 employees have been reassigned and face discipline and another three have left the department because of the case. She also implemented a handful of reforms, including:

Forcing workers from different counties to investigate complaints about foster families. The change comes because Ricky's mother, Lisa, was close with a case worker who allowed the family to adopt children even after Ricky disappeared.

More oversight by supervisors at county and regional levels to look for trends, such as four complaints against the Hollands of child abuse in Jackson County and five in Ingham County that came after Ricky disappeared. Those complaints didn't prevent the family from taking custody of his siblings.

Closer relationships with the Michigan State Police to provide workers with training on how to investigate abuse complaints, such as Ricky's complaint to a social worker that he was tied to a bed with a dog rope. It was deemed not credible.

Greater implementation of an automated system for tracking reports from foster, adoption and child protection workers, which would have allowed case workers to keep tabs on the Hollands after they left Jackson.

Udow stopped short of saying that anything the state may have done would have saved the boy, noting "the Hollands killed Ricky."

"Reforms are under way," said Liz Boyd, a spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm. "In many respects this internal investigation is unprecedented."

But the report was heavily redacted and failed to satisfy critics who say the system is broken.

"I'm not going to sit idly by when we have children dying under our watch and not do anything," said state Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, chairman of a committee investigating the boy's death.

He is sponsoring legislation that would transfer supervision of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman from the governor to the Legislature. Granholm opposes the bill, which has been approved by the House and could go to the Senate next week.

Law wants more details of the Holland case, claiming his committee has been stonewalled by state regulators and the ombudsman's office, both of which answer to Granholm.

The ombudsman refused to turn over Ricky's confidential case files so lawmakers could conduct their own investigation, Law said.

Tim and Lisa Holland became Ricky's foster parents in September 2000, and his adoption was finalized in Jackson County in October 2003.

His two brothers and a sister each were placed with the Hollands shortly after they were born, and then adopted. One of the most scathing indictments in the ombudsman's report dealt with procedures that were ignored in order to expedite the adoptions.

A worker failed to reassess in each child's case the appropriateness of the placement and instead cut and pasted information from Ricky's assessment onto his siblings' assessment form.

In the case of the last child, adopted after Ricky disappeared, the adoption worker requested an "expedited" adoption without a court hearing, which was quickly granted.

The DHS said that they could not investigate thoroughly because the adoption worker has died.

The DHS report confirmed, as was previously reported in The Detroit News, that Child Protective Services received four complaints that Ricky was being abused. Those complaints all were found to be unsubstantiated.

"Lots of people failed Ricky Holland, his adoptive parents clearly failed him, but so did a system that didn't protect him after the adoption," said Sharon Claytor Peters, president of Michigan's Children, a nonprofit advocacy group.

The Hollands reported him missing on July 2, 2005. Tim Holland led detectives to Ricky's body Jan. 27, and told police that Lisa had killed the child. Tim told police he disposed of the body in the rural Ingham County swamp.

Lisa Holland has been sentenced to life in prison for killing Ricky. Her husband Tim testified against her at her trial and was allowed to plead guilty to second-degree murder. He could serve 60 years in prison.

Detroit News Staff Writer Charlie Cain contributed to this report. You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

'More should have been done'

In what administrators describe as an unprecedented disclosure, the Michigan Department of Human Services acknowledged several mistakes before the July 2005 murder of one-time foster child Ricky Holland. Among them:

"Additional investigative steps should have been taken when the child's statement was in conflict with the foster parent's explanations."

"Staff (was) over-reliant on the foster parents self-reporting regarding the care and condition of the foster children rather than making a more independent assessment."

"In gathering adoption assessments, DHS adoption workers appear to have relied on the thoroughness of the initial licensing study rather than gathering updated information. When assessing the prospective adoptive family's suitability, the worker did not complete the more extensive evaluation that is required before a family is allowed to adopt four or more children."

"(O)ur report clearly indicates that more should have been done."

Source: The Department of Human Services

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Report: System failed Ricky; workers didn't always follow law

State finds other Holland children left 'vulnerable'; 10 DHS caseworkers under investigation

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

Published December 9, 2006

The actions taken by child welfare workers in Jackson and Ingham counties failed to protect 7-year-old Ricky Holland, who was murdered by his parents, according to a report released Friday.

Workers from Child Protective Services and Department of Human Services did not follow certain laws and policies, contends a report from the Office of Children's Ombudsman.

That also left the remaining children in the Holland household "extremely vulnerable," the report states. To release the findings of her department's investigation, DHS Director Marianne Udow held a news conference Friday.

"Some policies were not followed," she said, later adding: "I cannot tell you if we do everything right, we can prevent every tragedy from occurring."

Lisa Holland, found guilty of first-degree murder in October, has been sentenced to life in prison.

Her husband, Tim Holland, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and will spend at least 30 years in prison.

The Hollands, who lived in Jackson before moving to Williamston in May 2005, were Ricky's foster parents for about three years before they adopted him in October 2003. They also adopted Ricky's three siblings and have a biological child. Those children are living with Tim Holland's relatives.

Detailed report

The ombudsman's office, established by the state Legislature in 1994, monitors children's welfare in

the state. A detailed but often-redacted report released Friday morning found:

- Child Protective Services failed to interview all the pertinent people who could have shed light on complaints of Ricky's abuse.
- CPS did not interview Tim Holland during investigations of alleged abuse against some or all of the Holland children.
- A Jackson County DHS adoption worker did not follow policy as the Hollands went through the adoption process with Ricky. The worker failed to meet with the Hollands in their home, and the report states there is no evidence the worker ever met with Tim Holland.

The report's numerous recommendations include:

- Increased training for CPS workers.
- Establishing policy that CPS workers must collect and document evidence that sufficiently discredits a child's claim of abuse/neglect before discounting that claim.
- Developing policy so CPS workers investigate the scenes where abuse/neglect are alleged to have occurred.

The report also asked Ingham County DHS to explain why it did not take action to protect Ricky's four siblings after becoming aware one of them suffered injuries more than three months after Ricky was reported missing and the Hollands were being investigated by police.

Children's Ombudsman Verlie Ruffin said her agency's recommendations are not binding. But she said the DHS has been "compliant and receptive."

"We're in this field to improve the child-welfare system," she said, adding her office will follow up on the recommendations, as they do in all cases, to make sure the system is improved.

Investigating employees

Friday also was the first time DHS has issued a public report into any child welfare case, Udow said.

Her department has begun disciplinary investigations of 10 of the 23 employees who worked on the Holland case over five years in both Jackson and Ingham counties, she said. Nine of the 10 have been reassigned to positions that have little or no connection to child welfare. Two of the 23 have resigned; one has died.

Udow admitted the agency did not do everything it could have in the Holland case.

Jackson County Child Protective Services received four complaints regarding Ricky, she said, but none resulted in any action. In part, she blamed Lisa Holland's lies and deceptions.

"They trusted Lisa Holland's word," she said.

One complaint dealt with marks on Ricky's wrist, which he claimed were from being tied to his bed.

Lisa Holland gave another explanation, Udow said, and caseworkers erred by only focusing on the cause of the marks - not the conflicting statements.

Udow also described the overwhelming caseloads faced by DHS caseworkers.

Annually, about 1,600 child welfare workers statewide handle more than 70,000 investigations, she said. They also oversee about 18,000 children in foster care.

"Our employees have some of the most difficult jobs imaginable," she said, handling "an overwhelming volume of work, where vulnerable lives hang in the balance every day."

As part of recent reforms, she said the agency has added 51 caseworkers.

What went wrong

In July 2005, Tim Holland reported Ricky missing. However, by that time, the boy already had been killed and dumped in a marshlike field near Dansville. Tim and Lisa Holland's subsequent court appearances revealed the torture and abuse inflicted upon Ricky during his life.

State Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, has played a key role in trying to find out what went wrong. On Friday, he said he will seek an unredacted version of the ombudsman's report.

If denied, he plans to hold a closed session of his subcommittee Wednesday, where lawmakers would analyze the unredacted report.

"We need to see what went wrong and what we can do to fix the problem," Law said.

"The quicker the Legislature can act, the quicker we can help children from being caught up in this quagmire. We have to do what we can to make sure this doesn't happen again."

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Published December 9, 2006

Caseworkers are often overburdened, some experts say

Lansing State Journal

With a critical report released Friday on what could have been done to prevent Ricky Holland's death, two child welfare experts say more needs to be done to not only lighten the load for caseworkers but also to train them better.

Lynne Martinez, the state's former children's ombudsman, said caseworkers face an extremely tough job.

"Casework is very difficult," said Martinez, who served in the Michigan office from 2003 to 2005.

"Workers have to make very tough decisions; even the police in this case were tricked by the Hollands."

Part of the problem is that the Department of Human Services is underfunded and caseworkers' loads are too high, Martinez said.

"Every day they walk into their office, they have piles and piles of cases to review," she said.

Maxine Thome, executive director of the Michigan chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, agrees.

In her organization, Thome works with many Child Protective Services caseworkers.

"Because their caseloads are so huge,

Ombudsman report

Highlights of findings and recommendations from the Office of Children's Ombudsman review of the Department of Human Services' handling of the Holland case:

- Child Protective Services failed to interview all the pertinent people who could have shed light on complaints of Ricky's abuse.

- CPS also failed to take the necessary steps to protect the other Holland children.

- The report recommends CPS identify how it determined Ricky's siblings "were or were not at imminent risk of harm, especially after CPS was informed by law enforcement that Ricky was likely dead and that the Hollands were the focus of the criminal investigation." DHS, in its response, said "at the time, the department did not have sufficient evidence to support a preponderance of evidence of abuse or neglect." DHS also cited 55 contacts and 11 interviews with police while investigating the safety of Ricky's siblings.

- CPS failed to conduct a scene investigation when looking into specific complaints of abuse. The Department of Human Services refutes that point in the report, admitting, however, that more steps should have been taken when a child's "disclosure was in direct conflict with the caretaker's denial."

- CPS did not interview Tim Holland during investigations of alleged abuse against some or all of the Holland children and recommended DHS "identify the steps it will take to ensure workers consistently make contact with a child's parents during an investigation."

- The foster care supervisor overseeing Ricky's case "provided inadequate oversight regarding service planning and implementation," a point with which DHS agrees.

- A Jackson County DHS adoption worker did not follow policy as the Hollands went through the adoption process with Ricky. The worker failed to meet with the Hollands in their home, and the report states there is no evidence that the worker ever met with Tim Holland.

- A Jackson County foster home licensing worker responsible for making sure the Hollands were following the law in regard to operating a foster home did not interview a person who made a complaint to CPS regarding abuse of Ricky. The DHS agrees, stating the worker is not required to contact the source of the complaint.

Source: Office of Children's Ombudsman

DHS reform

The state Department of Human Services announced Friday several steps it has taken to address issues related to the Holland case. The agency said, however, fundamental reforms already were under way. Highlights include:

- More oversight at both the county and regional level.

many are anxious to leave," she said.

"It's not that they are not committed to their jobs, but they work the hardest cases, and that is emotionally fatiguing."

Thome said properly training caseworkers also is key.

Now, CPS workers do not need degrees in social work, something Thome would like to work with universities and the DHS to change.

Martinez echoed the importance of training, saying DHS Director Marianne Udow is working hard to address that.

"I know she's had police officers come in to help workers detect criminal activity," Martinez said.

Thome said such training needs to go further among police officers, prosecutors and caseworkers.

"There needs to be cross-training and learning at the frontline level," she said.

- Improved sharing of information between counties and programs.
- Established a protocol that will require workers in a particular county, who receive a licensing complaint about a foster/adoptive parent, to have a different county conduct the investigation.
- Mandated training in both Jackson and Ingham counties related to specific issues in the Holland case.
- Reviewed all Jackson County files to confirm that all of the county's licensed foster homes have current training.

Other reforms include:

- Adding 51 Child Protective Services workers.
- Refocusing policy to keep children with their biological families whenever safely possible.
- Increasing frequency of background checks for licensed and relative caregivers.

Source: Department of Human Services

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- [Report: System failed Ricky; workers didn't always follow law](#)

DHS Releases Holland Report

MIRS, Friday, December 8, 2006

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has released its internal report in the role the DHS played in the death of Ricky **HOLLAND**. As a result, the department is preparing to move nine of the 23 employees who handled the Holland case to positions within the department that have no or very little responsibility for the safety of children.

Holland was murdered by his adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa **HOLLAND**. After the murder, DHS started an investigation to determine if DHS failures had inadvertently played a role in his demise.

DHS Director Marianne **UDOW** said that in the Holland case, not all of the department's procedures were followed and some of the procedures needed to be revamped. She did not say that Ricky's death was the department's fault, but repeatedly said that the department failed to follow certain protocol.

"We did not follow policies in every way that we could," she said.

During the five-year Holland case — he entered foster care in 2000 and was adopted in 2003 — 23 different DHS workers handled the Holland case. They made required visits to the Holland home, but didn't always document "clear assessments of the family's needs as foster and adoptive parents."

The workers also documented going into the home, but did not follow up with a report on the visit. The Jackson County child protection services (CPS) workers also looked into four complaints that were filed in the Holland case. Only one of the four complaints was issued against the foster parents. Ricky apparently had marks on his arm, which he said were from being tied to a bed. Lisa Holland denied this, the CPS workers investigated the complaint, but did not focus as much on the child's statement.

Udow acknowledged that the workers should have listened to Ricky. She went on to say that one issue in the Holland case was that the DHS workers involved in the case trusted the Hollands and thought they were good foster parents.

Udow marked Lisa Holland as a "deceptive" person who convinced the workers that she was a good mother. Udow also said that Lisa acted very concerned about Ricky and his siblings, constantly calling the schools and the DHS to check up on her children.

"We cannot be so trusting in the future," Udow said.

To help DHS workers avoid falsely trusting a foster parent or adoptive parent, the DHS will now require caseworkers to review cases in other counties to impart an objective opinion on the case. Udow said when workers are together in an office, one worker's opinion of a set of foster parents tends to spread around the office.

Having workers from other counties that haven't heard the office buzz, will plant more objectivity into the system and hopefully catch more questionable behavior, she said.

After reviewing all 23 employees' involvement with the Holland case, the DHS decided to investigate the 10 employees who had excessive involvement with the case. As a result,

nine were reassigned to other positions; one supervisor kept his or her supervisory position with more DHS oversight; two left the DHS because of resignation or retirement and one worker died.

The department has also been making some changes that will hopefully improve childcare. Udow said many of the changes were implemented when Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** was elected and she took over the DHS.

Those improvements include:

Increased efforts to keep kids with their biological families whenever safe and possible

Adding 51 child protective service workers to the DHS

Establishing a statewide 1-800 number for reporting and recording child safety issues

Updating computer system so all offices across the state can have access to records

Mandating training in program specific supervisory skills and increasing the frequency of background checks for licensed and relative care givers

"I cannot tell you that even if we do everything right we can prevent all tragedies from occurring," Udow said.

Rep. David **LAW** (R-Commerce Twp.) said he is frustrated that it took so long for the DHS to release the report. He asked for the report Feb. 16.

"Numerous mistakes were made in this case - with tragic results," Law said. "We must use this report to make positive changes in the foster care system to ensure other children do not go through what Ricky did. According to the report, Ricky told people in authority some of the terrible things that were happening to him. It is unacceptable that DHS workers used only the parents' denial as proof he was making it up - forcing Ricky and his siblings to stay in the abusive environment."

Udow said it took the DHS a long time to release the report because the prosecutors involved in the Holland case asked that the information not be released until the conclusion of the trial, which just recently ended. Udow also pointed out that this is the first time the Department has released such a report.

Law is chair of the House Special Committee on Child Protection, which will meet next week to discuss the confidential portions of the report.

"I understand the importance of maintaining the integrity of the court and not doing anything that would jeopardize the prosecution of the people responsible for this horrible crime," Law said. "But 11 months is too long to wait for information that could save other children in the same situation."

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Article published Dec 7, 2006

Problems found in child abuse probes

House committee told case workers aren't always thorough enough.

LANSING (AP) -- Case workers in Michigan failed to investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect thoroughly or within mandated time-frames in 68 of 111 cases reviewed by the state's Office of Children's Ombudsman, according to a new report.

The agency presented its 2004-05 report Tuesday to the House Family and Children's Services Committee. It found 37 instances in which workers submitted incomplete, untimely, inaccurate or insufficient documentation. The report also found nine instances in which foster children did not receive needed services, six examples of insufficient supervisory oversight of case workers and four instances of workers assessing the safety of only one child in a home where more than one child lived.

The office received 782 complaints regarding nearly 1,400 children during 2004-2005 and deemed 111 of them valid for review, The Detroit News reported.

Michigan Report

December 8, 2006

OMBUDSMAN FINDS FAULTS WITH D.H.S. HANDLING OF HOLLAND CASE

A report released Friday detailing the Office of Children's Ombudsman's investigation into the case of 7-year-old Ricky Holland found several instances where workers did not fully comply with Department of Human Services policies and that those policies in relation to the case did not provide sufficient guidance to employees.

In response, the department has undergone and continues to undergo fundamental changes to its policies, including mandatory monthly background checks for licensed and relative caregivers, further training for caseworkers and supervisors, individual case evaluation each month and adding automation systems to better document each case.

The actions of the 23 employees involved in the Holland case in Jackson and Ingham counties over the past five years have been reviewed, resulting in 10 employees (including six supervisors) receiving disciplinary actions, said DHS Director Marianne Udow.

Of those 10, nine have been reassigned temporarily to positions where they have little to no responsibility over the decisions involving the safety of children as their cases are investigated further. One employee has remained in a supervisory position but with additional oversight. Two employees out of the 23 have resigned or retired and one has died.

Lisa Holland, Ricky's adoptive mother, was recently convicted of first-degree murder based on her son's death in July 2005, and Tim Holland, Ricky's adoptive father, pled guilty to second-degree murder and assisted prosecutors in their case against his wife. Ms. Holland was sentenced to life in prison, while Mr. Holland will serve 30-60 years.

"Full justice for Ricky means addressing what we all can do," Ms. Udow said during a press conference regarding the department's own findings on the matter. A further report by Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings is also expected to be completed soon on the matter, though Ms. Udow said that no DHS employees are under criminal investigation.

The department's Family-to-Family program will also help in refocusing the child welfare system, Ms. Udow said, however she also outlined that caseworkers are overloaded and have been deeply affected by the Ricky Holland case and others in recent months.

Office of Family Advocate Director Steve Yager also discussed Ms. Hollands' "hyperactive" role – always calling the state and checking up with things, which created a false sense that the family could be trusted.

“We cannot be so trusting in the future, we simply cannot,” Ms. Udow said, adding that in coming forward with this information in the most public forum to date, she hoped Michigan residents would learn what they could do to help in the future as well.

The 43-page [report](#) released to the media by [Rep. David Law](#) (R-Commerce Township), chair of the Special Committee on Child Protection, contains several redacted provisions to comply with privacy requirements. Mr. Law said he plans to hold a closed session of the committee next week to specifically address some of the scenarios in the full 85-plus-page Holland investigation report.

“In the 11 months since I originally requested this report, several other children have died who were under the supervision of the Department of Human Services,” Mr. Law said. “I want answers from the department on what went wrong in each of those cases. The system is not working and Michigan’s children are in danger. Legislators can affect change within DHS and need the facts immediately in order to do so.”

The ombudsman’s report details breakdowns in the child protective services, foster care, adoption and licensure policies.

One of most faulted instances outlined in the report states that while an investigation into Ricky’s claim that he was tied to the bed at night with a dog leash took place, the Jackson County CPS worker did not complete a comprehensive scene investigation by not asking Ricky to reenact what occurred.

The department responded that while the worker had contacted a supervisor, the Head Start teacher for Community Action Agency and the assigned foster care worker, that was not documented in the incident report because policy stated that other informational sources are contacted “as needed” to verify the complainant’s description of a situation. A scene investigation was conducted by the CPS and foster care workers, but when Ms. Holland directly denied Ricky’s disclosure, a more thorough investigation of all allegations was not conducted.

“CPS documented no information or evidence that Ricky was being untruthful, had reason to lie, was coached, or that his disclosures were not credible,” the review report states. “Other than the parent’s denial, there was no information or evidence to refute Ricky’s (redacted).”

The ombudsman recommended that the department develop CPS policy to fit with Child Welfare Institute training as it pertains to scene investigations, which was drafted into the CPS manual in November.

The report also recommends that through policy, practice and training, the department emphasize the collection of evidence before a child’s disclosure of abuse or neglect is discredited. Parental denial is a component described in the department’s manual as of September, though DHS said that workers did not outright discredit Ricky’s claim.

The department has also implemented another provision, based on ombudsman recommendations, that CPS workers be required to re-contact a mandatory reporter, as in a teacher, doctor, etc., if the original allegation came from that person.

Ingham County CPS was also faulted for not thoroughly complying with investigations as it applied to the complaints it received after Ricky's disappearance, specifically not interviewing enough collateral sources as outlined by the department.

The report found fault in the procedure of Ingham County CPS in protecting the four other children under the care of the Hollands. The couple had adopted Ricky's three younger siblings and had one child of their own.

"All the children in the care of the Hollands were extremely vulnerable based upon their ages," the report states. "None of the children could protect themselves or communicate what was happening in the home. Only one child was in school and none of the rest was seen regularly by any mandated reporters."

The ombudsman also states that CPS should have consulted with the Bureau of Legal Affairs to discuss legal options in ensuring the children were protected.

The department disagreed with these findings, stating, "CPS did not determine that a petition for jurisdiction and removal was necessary to ensure the safety of the children. Rather, due to the complex nature of the case, a petition was drafted for use in consultation with the prosecutor's office and law enforcement. At the time, the department did not have sufficient evidence to support a preponderance of evidence of abuse or neglect."

The department further stated that the age of the children and their communication skills is not considered a preponderance of evidence under DHS policies or Michigan's Child Protection law. DHS also stated that CPS, law enforcement and the prosecutor's office have a strong, long-standing relationship.

The Hollands, who were living in Williamston at the time, reported Ricky had run away in July 2005. In fact, in June Ms. Holland had hit Ricky in the head with a hammer and her husband testified that his son became enervated over the course of a week until his death on July 1. Mr. Holland had disposed of the body in a nearby swamp and led police to the scene in January 2006.

The report also found that CPS did not interview Mr. Holland until the third complaint was filed in Ingham County, which the department agreed was in violation of its policy, though it added that since then, emphasis in staff meetings has been placed on this issue.

The ombudsman also found that CPS did not complete a safety assessment during its investigation, although the department said workers informally did just that.

In relation to the foster care program, the report found that no home visits to the Hollands were documented by the state from October 2000 to September 2002, contrary to policy. DHS cites 36 face-to-face visits between the Hollands and the state, but documentation does not specify where those encounters took place and the department is now supervising that more efficiently to ensure that those visits take place in the home.

The report also found that foster care did not know the prescription drugs Ricky was taking until 11 months after they had been discontinued and that foster care did not ensure timely services for Ricky's identified needs. The department said that while services were delayed, others were made available to Ricky.

“The OCO recommends that DHS identify its process for ensuring that children who are prescribed psychotropic medications are receiving medications as part of a comprehensive treatment plan,” the report states.

The department said it would convene a workgroup on this recommendation.

In terms of the adoption program, the report found that there was no evidence the worker ever met Mr. Holland or met the family in their home prior to the foster family study being finalized, which was a substitute for the adoptive family assessment. DHS agreed in this error, but in another instance did not comment further because the worker in this case is deceased.

The report also found that in the Hollands’ subsequent adoptions that no follow-up assessments were being made, particularly in evaluations required for a family with four children or more. DHS stated that eight contacts were made by adoption workers but were not documented in the official assessments. The report also found that both the adoption worker and adoption supervisor for Ricky and one of his siblings had been newly assigned to the case.

“DHS will amend policy to require that the Adoptive Family Assessment includes both an assessment of the family’s ability to meet the needs of each child in the home and documentation of consultation with professionals and service providers who have worked with the family,” the department stated in a response.

And in relation to the foster home licensing program, the report found that in response to one complaint, the Jackson County licensing worker did not garner enough information to determine whether the Hollands were in noncompliance with licensing regulations. The department responded to this finding in the same way it did with the CPS recommendation (both were dealing with the same complaint). Several training and policy changes relating to the Jackson County site were outlined by DHS as well.

Canton foster mom bound over for trial in toddler's death

December 11, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Former foster mother Carol Poole was ordered today to stand trial on charges of first-degree murder and first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter in the Sept. 22 death of 2-year-old foster child Allison Newman in Poole's Canton Township home.

Poole, 40, gave police four versions of what happened to Allison that caused a fatal traumatic head injury, Canton Police Detective Michael Wells testified today at Poole's preliminary examination in 35th District Court in Plymouth.

During an interview at the University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital, Wells said Poole gave these versions of events:

-- That Allison banged her head herself on the rail of her toddler bed.

-- That Allison slipped and fell in the bathtub while Poole was caring for a 3-month-old foster baby.

-- That Allison fell off the bathroom sink counter and hit her head on the floor while Poole was attending to the other child.

--That Poole was playing a game called "whirlybird" with Allison, swinging her in a circle with her ankles and knees pressed against Poole's chest, at the top of the second-floor balcony in her home. Poole told police she twirled the child more than 10 times and became dizzy. She said Allison lurched back and Poole lost control and the child fell more than 12 feet to a hardwood floor.

Washtenaw County Medical Examiner Bader Cassin testified that the severe head injury to the back of her skull caused Allison's death, but he could not determine whether the manner of death was homicide or accident, based on the autopsy.

Judge John E. MacDonald ordered that Poole remain in the Wayne County Jail without bond pending arraignment in Wayne County Circuit Court.

Step mom guilty in dehydration case

December 8, 2006 - 12:07PM



(NEWS 3) – A stepmother in Coldwater has been found guilty of child abuse after two children suffered from dehydration.

Brandalyn Wertz-Hale and her husband Jonathon were arrested in 2003 for allegedly feeding salty foods to Jonathon's 2 and 4-year-old children and then keeping water from them.

The jury found Brandalyn Wertz-Hale guilty of two counts of second-degree child abuse.

She is scheduled to be sentenced on January 12th and faces a maximum sentence of four years in prison.

Jonathon Hale will go to trial in January.

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Article published Dec 8, 2006

Father arrested after infant son suffers nine broken bones

By Kurt Kuban
Staff Writer

Canton Police officers arrested a 27-year-old Canton man Thursday in what they say is just the latest incident in rash of cases of adults physically injuring infants in the township.

According to Canton Detective Sgt. Rick Pomorski, police arrested the man, who lives in a mobile home in the 51000 block of Mott Road, after suspecting him of abusing his 5-week-old infant son. Pomorski said the department received a tip from an anonymous female caller who told detectives she heard a rumor that the man was abusing the child.

"She heard from a friend that this guy might be abusing the baby," Pomorski said.

After receiving the call, two Canton officers were dispatched to the home. Pomorski said the officers arrested the man on some minor outstanding warrants. When they checked the baby, they noticed minor injuries, according to Pomorski. As a matter of procedure, they called for a rescue unit to transport the newborn to the University of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital, where he was examined by doctors.

"A doctor called us from the hospital and told us he had suffered nine individual broken bones," Pomorski said. "He has a broken tibia, a fibula, and several toes."

As of Friday, the baby was still at the hospital and additional testing was being done to determine if there were any other injuries.

Pomorski said the case has been turned over to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. He was hoping the suspect would be arraigned on Saturday at the out-county courthouse in Romulus.

As of Friday, police hadn't released the man's name, pending his arraignment. Pomorski said the man could be facing first degree child abuse charges, a felony which is punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Police investigators believe the suspect, who is unemployed, was home alone with the child when the injuries occurred. The baby's mother also lives in the home, but police don't believe she was involved in the injuries. However, Pomorski said he is unsure whether Child Protective Services will allow the woman to take the baby home after he is released from the hospital.

Pomorski said the department has dealt with too many of these kinds of cases in recent years.

"We've had five of these cases in the last two years, and unfortunately most have ended in death for the infants," he said.

Pomorski credited both the woman who called police and the dispatcher who took the call and followed up with it. He said the case should be a reminder to people who might suspect someone of abusing a child.

"The lady who called us deserves a lot of credit. If she hadn't called, we firmly believe we would have had another child death. It was a matter of time," Pomorski said. "A lot of people who have suspicions about cases like this might say they don't want to bother us or it won't do any good to call. I'm saying please give us a call."

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Police: Baby with broken bones was abused

Kevin Hill

Journal Newspapers Staff Writer

A 5-week-old infant has nine broken bones and his father is in Canton police custody under suspicion of abusing the child.

The 27-year-old father may be arraigned on abuse charges as soon as Saturday. He was arrested Thursday after a resident concerned about the child's welfare called police and asked for the number of Child Protective Services.

"Our dispatcher recognized there was something more and sent an officer out to the house," said Sgt. Rick Pomorski, of the Canton police.

Two officers went to the residence, located inside the Wagon Wheel mobile home park. They observed some bleeding from the infant's lip, said Pomorski. They took statements from the father, mother and her 13-year-old daughter, and a rescue unit transported the baby to University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor for examination.

Doctors from the Child Protection Team there found broken bones in the child's toes, legs and rib cage. The baby was still being examined Friday for any additional injuries.

"The child is expected to make a full recovery, but the injuries were serious," said Pomorski.

The father, who remains in police custody, is the only person suspected of abusing the child. His identity has not been released because he has not been formally charged with a crime.

Police were expected to forward the results of their investigation to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office today. An arraignment on the charges would likely take place tomorrow, according to Pomorski.

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MONDAY DECEMBER 11, 2006 Last modified: *Friday, December 8, 2006 3:09 PM EST*

Babysitter charged in second abuse case

Katie May VanDever, who is already facing trial for allegedly breaking a 10-month-old baby's arm, was arraigned Thursday in Lenawee County District Court on a second child-abuse charge for allegedly punching the baby's 3-year-old stepbrother in the stomach.

From staff reports

ADRIAN — An Adrian woman already facing trial for allegedly breaking a 10-month-old baby's arm was arraigned Thursday in Lenawee County District Court on a second child-abuse charge for allegedly punching the baby's 3-year-old stepbrother in the stomach.

The woman, 35-year-old Katie May VanDever, was babysitting the children in October and early November when the injuries occurred.

During her arraignment by video Thursday from the Lenawee County Jail, VanDever was scheduled for a Dec. 18 preliminary examination on new charges of first-degree child abuse and assault with intent to do great bodily harm. She faces up to a 15-year prison term if convicted.

A \$100,000 bond was set Thursday in addition to a \$20,000 bond that has kept VanDever in jail since she was arrested in the first case nearly a month ago.

In the new case, VanDever is accused of causing internal injuries by punching the boy in the stomach on Oct. 26. According to Adrian police reports, the boy was taken to Toledo Children's Hospital after suffering flu-like symptoms that did not improve. An injury to his pancreas was discovered. The boy told investigators that VanDever hit him in the stomach with her fist clenched, said Sgt. Tom Ray.

The incident was reported to Adrian police on Nov. 13, said Ray, the same day VanDever was arraigned in the first case involving the baby. The girl was injured while VanDever was left to care for the children on Nov. 7, he said, and a medical examination found broken bones in her arm.

VanDever pleaded not guilty to first-degree child abuse Wednesday in circuit court in the case involving the broken arm. She was scheduled for a jury trial on Feb. 7.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



Muskegon Chronicle

Advocates: Troubled kids need more help

Friday, December 08, 2006

By Steve Gunn

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

If Muskegon County commissioners heard any clear message from the public Thursday, it was this:

A new juvenile detention center may well be necessary to house the county's youthful offenders. But what's even more important is creating programs to provide the opportunity for kids to rehabilitate, whether they're lodged in a detention center, enrolled in a special program or spending time with a local family that cares.

As former social service agency director Don Pranger told commissioners, "The juvenile justice system is not a place. It's a community and a series of programs."

Or as Peggy Selmon put it, "Community involvement is very important. If you don't have that, you may as well not build anything."

County officials are considering the possibility of building a new jail and juvenile detention center, to replace the crowded, outdated facilities that currently exist.

They've hired an outside firm to study the two facilities and eventually issue "master plans" with recommendations for new buildings. County leaders anticipate asking voters to approve a property tax millage to pay for the new structures.

But county officials are being particularly cautious with plans for a juvenile facility, because they realize the future of a lot of children will be affected by their decisions.

A special study group of county employees formed last summer, to add their ideas for an new juvenile detention center to those of the hired architect.

The study group's preliminary report called for a facility with roughly 48 beds, more than twice the 22 beds in the existing Whitehall Township facility. But the group also want to offer treatment programs inside the facility and out, so all of the beds are rarely needed at one time.

"We know we have a rare window of opportunity to design and build it right the first time," said Patricia Steele, administrator of Muskegon County's Circuit Court and chairwoman of the study group.

Before they file their final report, the study group wanted to hear what the public had to say on the matter. So they asked county commissioners to host a public hearing Thursday to gather input.

Several dozen residents showed up, and most who rose to speak wholeheartedly endorsed the group's focus on rehabilitation.

"A juvenile detention center is just a step below a prison," said resident Malachi Williams. "I want to know what you're planning on doing so we don't have to have 48 beds (in a new juvenile facility)."

Pranger, the former director of Child and Family Services, told commissioners he used to believe in the liberal use of institutions.

But he said experience taught him that young people are best helped in a community setting, with positive programs available to help them succeed.

"For years I advocated that the best place to treat children were institutions with nice buildings and fancy programs, but I was wrong," Pranger said. "I happen to think that Muskegon County needs a new detention center. It's a necessary component. But if that's where everyone's attention is, you're only going to help 48 kids at a time.

"There are some kids that need to be isolated from their families for a time, but that's a very small minority. I believe community-based alternatives are better than institutions."

Selmon, who said her church has worked with troubled kids, believes any new approach to juvenile justice should involve more volunteers who want to help youthful offenders.

"There are good people out there who would like to help with these kids," Selmon said. "They are our next generation."

Dorothy May asked commissioners if there was a way for concerned citizens to offer shelter to young offenders "while they are going through the system." She was told that some type of program may be possible, if it's consistent with state foster care guidelines.

Barb Barteau, who said she used to teach classes at the current juvenile center, said the facility already plays a critical role in kids' lives. She said a new facility could be a very positive force if it had more to offer.

"There are a lot of kids who return time after time to this facility, and it's not a coincidence they do this," Barteau said. "They find some respite there. They're more comfortable dealing their problems and education therer. It would be nice if they could have some more programming available while they're detained."

County officials reassured the residents that they are focused on the same ideas.

Steele said having a solid network of community-based programs would benefit both the children and the county, because it would help keep the number of incarcerated kids at a minimum.

She also said effective local treatment programs may help the county avoid the cost of sending some kids to out-of-town treatment centers. The county's Child Care Fund has been stretched in recent years by such costs.

"This is not just a way to save the Child Care Fund cash," Steele said. "There are going to be kids who require services so intensive that it will require sending them out of Muskegon. But can there be a local service model that can help reduce those costs? We think so."

Commissioner John Snider offered a word of caution, saying that any effective array of treatment programs for youthful offenders will take time to build.

"It's not something you just put in place," Snider said. "(The programs) have to be tailored to the community's particular needs. If you don't do that, you're going down the wrong road initially."

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Published December 10, 2006

On to the real world: Once-troubled teens in National Guard program graduate; move on to the challenge of families, school, jobs - success

By Susan Vela
Lansing State Journal

They returned home Saturday, determined to prove that the Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy turned their lives around.

Shattered families, dysfunctional workplaces or negative influences that include drugs, alcohol and persuasive friends will test their will.

However, no matter what happens, they'll always have memories of the academy. Eighty-nine cadets, including 13 females, graduated Saturday from the Michigan National Guard's one-of-a-kind paramilitary school.

"You made a choice, which others didn't," Col. James Anderson said. "You persevered. Perseverance is not easy, but neither is life. Today, you can bask in the glory that is the result of your accomplishments."

The cadets fulfilled more than 3,500 hours of rigorous study to arrive at Saturday's graduation ceremony.

"Not one cadet here today will go home and be the same person that got dropped off 22 weeks ago," said Sara Wilhelm, 16, of Dearborn Heights, while delivering Class 15's graduation address. "These really were the best days of our lives."

Cameras flashed Saturday at Battle Creek's Northwestern Middle School and parents applauded as teens walked across the stage for their graduation certificates. Then, the teens saluted the



(Photo by Robert Killips/Lansing State Journal file photo)
Thanks: Standing tall, Montrello Griffin, 16, of Lansing says goodbye and thank you to Gunnery Sgt. Pete Maierle before graduating Saturday from the Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy in Battle Creek.

Into the future

Participants in the Michigan Youth ChalleNGe Academy graduated Saturday, but their journey in life is just beginning. The Lansing State Journal will check back periodically with graduates to inform readers about their progress.

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academy and its drill sergeants, who never let them slide.

"M-Y-C-A!" the teens shouted.

The graduates were once at-risk youths with little hope of completing traditional high schools. They skipped school and received poor grades. In some cases, they already faced criminal charges.

In July, they met the academy's drill sergeants, or cadre, when they and about 60 other teens were introduced to military-style chow, haircuts and physical training.

Soon after, one by one, teens began dropping out. There were 110 cadets when book-learning began July 24, 96 in mid-September and then 91 just before Thanksgiving break. The academy dismissed another two before graduation.

Meanwhile, the cadre instilled principles like discipline, leadership and teamwork. Before Saturday's graduation, the teens prayed that they would always remember they have the cadre and each other.

"At the beginning, you're trying to think about what's going to happen next," Lansing teen Raymond Lira said. On graduation day, "you're thinking about the good times you had. You don't want it to end."

Lira starts a construction job this month and plans to register for Lansing Community College classes in January. He's been considering a criminal justice career.

His mother, Linda, can barely believe the transformation. Raymond was once known for his anger issues and baggy pants. Now, his manners and leadership skills grab attention.

On their way home

Several families left immediately after graduation, departing for places as far away as Detroit and the Upper Peninsula. Others lingered so that they could reunite and watch their teens bid farewell to friends.

"This is what gives me a lot of job satisfaction - seeing the sparkle back in the cadets' eyes and seeing their families appreciate what we do," Sgt. 1st Class Jamie Hoaglin said.

Now, another tough chapter begins. Up to 10 percent of the graduates may never become productive citizens.

Ryan Gilliland, 17, of Eaton Rapids doesn't intend to be among them. "For once, I feel like I've accomplished something," said the youth who received awards for physical fitness and overall performance.

Ryan was cleared of a drug charge because of his commitment to the academy.

While he's not thrilled about reporting to work soon at a local fast-food place, at least the work will be in the food industry, which is his preference. He considers himself more responsible. And time at the academy only strengthened the relationship he has with his girlfriend.

"That's helped the time go by faster, just knowing that he's changed," Cassie Herig, 16, of Eaton Rapids said.

Opportunities loom

Academy teens study for their General Educational Development (GED), the equivalent of a high school diploma, while at the academy. Some still will return to traditional high schools so they can graduate with grade-school friends.

Shawna Ariss, 18, is heading back to Corunna High School. She hopes to juggle studies with a new computer job. "Words could never explain how amazing it feels to graduate," she said.

Mom Juli Ariss rushed to her side.

"We dropped off a little girl. They gave me a young woman," she said.

Shawna's younger brother, Steven, begins the academy's Class 16 in January.

Montrello Griffin, 16, of Lansing spent the last few days being light-hearted with his academy friends.

"This is something I'm always going to remember," he said.

He is going back to Waverly High School. He'll also be working at a McDonald's. Montrello's convinced that he can succeed without the constant tutelage of the academy's cadre. But they certainly helped.

"It's going to help me become productive," he said. "I'll have my own money. (And) I'm self-motivated. Instead of just going with the flow of things, I make things happen."

He plans to spend today visiting with family and checking on his upcoming work schedule.

Contact Susan Vela at 702-4248 or svela@lsj.com.

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Court: Child can't have two dads, legally

Saturday, December 9, 2006

By Steven Hepker

shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

The Michigan Court of Appeals has ruled a Jackson boy cannot legally have two dads.

The case is extremely complicated, but here is the scorecard:

Holly Mazurek gave birth to a son in 1999.

Martin Powers, her boyfriend then, acknowledged in court he was the legal father and is the only father the boy has known. The couple has since split.

Enter Gregory Sinicropi, whom Mazurek dated briefly. Sinicropi eventually sought a DNA test that confirmed he was the biological dad.

Jackson County Circuit Judge John McBain named Powers the natural and legal father. Sinicropi also was named the legal father.

But unless the county court revokes Powers' legal status, it cannot also confer parental rights to Sinicropi, the appeals court ruled Thursday.

All three filed appeals regarding the boy, now 7. The court reversed the county court and instructed "further reflection" on revocation of Powers' acknowledgment of parentage.

Elizabeth Warner, Powers' attorney, said she expects McBain will reiterate, in acceptable legal terms, that Powers is the legal father and Sinicropi is not.

"I tell every dad he must sign an affidavit of parentage," Warner said.

"It is like gold."

Children born in wedlock are considered a product of the marriage, no matter the biological father, she said. Men who are or want to be a father to kids born outside marriage must assert themselves with an acknowledgment of parentage, she said.

"We see this happening frequently now with so many illegitimate children," Warner said. "This is the only case I know of where the nonbiological dad got custody over the mother."

Powers has sole custody of the boy since Mazurek moved to Shepherd to live with her fiancé, court records show. They shared custody when she also lived in Jackson, and the arrangement worked well, the appeals case claims.

Mazurek maintained the court wrongly denied her shared custody after she moved. The appeals court disagreed and sided with McBain.

"... it was in the child's best interests to remain with Powers in Jackson, where he had lived most of his life, where he has a good support system, where he attended school, and where he is well-cared for and loved by Powers," the appeals court said.

If McBain again rules against revoking Powers' acknowledgment of parental rights, it "shall pronounce Powers as the child's legal father," the appeals court ruled.

In turn, he would have to sever Sinicropi's parentage, vacate his support order and let stand the court order giving full physical custody to Powers.

If McBain rules otherwise, the appeals court said, Powers would lose all parental rights and responsibilities for support, and Sinicropi would be named the sole dad. Custody and support would be redrawn. Both Sinicropi and the mother currently pay Powers child support.

Court records show Sinicropi has not sought parenting time, citing "the sake of the child."

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Michigan Report

December 8, 2006

COURTS MUST PICK BETWEEN LEGAL, BIOLOGICAL DAD

When a judge must decide whether a man who has been raising a child should have rights, even if he's found not to be the biological dad, or whether the man who fathered the child should be allowed to reunite with his progeny, the decision must favor one or the other – because the law demands that a child can only have one legal father, the Court of Appeals said in a published opinion released on Friday.

Appellate judges said that in the case of *Sinicropi v Mazurek* ([COA docket No. 268000](#)), the trial court ruled under the Acknowledgment of Parentage Act and the Paternity Act, awarding custody to the man who had acknowledged parenthood and raised the child but was later found not to be related, but also legally recognizing the biological father as responsible for child support payments.

Although the Legislature created both acts to ensure that children conceived out of wedlock have the same rights to a father as other children, lawmakers did not intend that the two acts be used simultaneously, Judge William Murphy wrote in an opinion signed by Judges Patrick Meter and Alton Davis.

“The Legislature did not intend the creation of two legal fathers for one child through utilization of both acts. A court cannot recognize both,” he said.

Judges reversed a trial court decision to establish Greg Sinicropi as the biological father of Holly Mazurek's son, while choosing not to take custody away from Martin Powers, the man who had claimed the child as his own until paternity testing showed he wasn't related to him.

Ms. Mazurek conceived her son with Mr. Sinicropi during a brief relationship, then returned to her long-term on-again, off-again relationship with Mr. Powers and had her son, not aware that Mr. Sinicropi was the father.

Mr. Powers acted as the father of the boy throughout his relationship with Ms. Mazurek and the two shared joint custody after their relationship ended.

A fight for custody ensued when Ms. Mazurek moved 90 miles away and Mr. Powers was granted sole custody of the child.

At that time, a DNA test found that Mr. Sinicropi was the biological father of the then five-year-old boy.

The lower court found that an established custodial environment had been created with Mr. Powers and refused to revoke his parental rights at Ms. Mazurek's request.

Under the Acknowledgement of Parentage Act, an acknowledgment of paternity can be reversed at the request of one of the parents or the child if new evidence or an error in fact is found, such as DNA evidence that proves someone else fathered the child.

However, even with undisputed genetic tests that rule out a biological connection to the child, judges must look at the equitability of reversing the assumption of parenthood, essentially deciding the best interests of the child in reversal and the fairness to the man who has acted as father up to the point of trial.

Although appellate judges didn't express worries that the lower court abused its discretion in not revoking Mr. Powers' and Ms. Mazurek's acknowledgment of parentage, it remanded the case and asked the judge to revisit the issue and spell out its findings for or against Mr. Powers using equitability as the crux of the issue.

They asked this partly to ensure that the finding is based on the spirit of the law but also because a finding for Mr. Powers should be very clear as it would take away all of Mr. Sinicropi's rights to the child.

If the lower court finds that Mr. Powers is the legal father, then any orders finding Mr. Sinicropi as a father, including orders of support, should be vacated, judges said.

If the lower court chooses to revoke Mr. Powers' parentage then on remand it must decide custody and support issues as it relates to Ms. Mazurek and Mr. Sinicropi.



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Published: Sunday, December 10, 2006

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Domestic abuse research planned

By KRISTEN KOHRT, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — With a \$78,000 grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Michigan, professors from Northern Michigan University and researchers will embark upon a two-phase project aiming to educate people on domestic abuse.

Kerri Schuiling, who is the assistant dean for the school of nursing at NMU as well as the president of the board at the Women's Center, is one of the project investigators. She said she hopes this project will have a positive impact on the community and how domestic violence is perceived in our culture.

"Our culture is beginning to change when it comes to domestic violence," she said. "A lot of women are getting up and saying 'this is wrong.' The wrong people are in hiding."

In the first phase of the project, researchers will recruit women who have had experiences with domestic violence and are willing to share their experiences. Jeanne Lorentzen, a professor of social work and sociology at NMU, and Jane Richards, who is with the Women's Center, will act as interviewers, asking the women questions in one-on-one interviews. Lorentzen will then work on analyzing the collected data.

So far, 15 women have participated in confidential interviews. They have been found at the Women's Shelter and the alcohol unit at Marquette General Hospital.

Lorentzen said the women interviewed so far are eager to educate women who have been abused and may not have sought help yet.

"The women who agreed to be part of this are very much interested in the welfare of other women who are being abused," she said. "They have a strong social conscience."

The main focus of the project is the role played by alcohol in domestic abuse. The interviews will question the women on their use of alcohol or their partner's use. Schuiling said women who use alcohol are more likely



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to be abused.

"As researchers, we don't believe alcohol causes violence," Schuiling said. "But in our culture, it is used as an excuse for violence. It's very important for their voices to be heard."

Another project goal is to educate nurses on the issue. Schuiling — a midwife by practice who has cared for many abuse victims — said nurses spend a significant amount of time with female patients and often are able to establish a trusting relationship.

"Abuse is often hidden," she said. "Often nurses who spend time with patients are able to do effective assessments and come up with an idea of whether they are being abused."

The second phase of the project is to produce an educational video to be distributed to domestic violence shelters, alcohol abuse programs and nursing education programs throughout Michigan.

The researchers hope to include some of the women who have been interviewed and are willing to reveal their identity and share their story on film.

Schuiling said she hopes the video will have a strong impact by showing real women who have survived and can share their story first hand.

"That's the point we think is so striking," she said. "It's her story, in her words, that hits home and makes us sit up and listen."

Video production is slated to begin in January of 2007, with a goal of completion a year later. Michael Loukinen, another professor of social work and sociology at NMU, is producing the film. Ira Hutchison, head of the social work and sociology department at NMU, will also be heavily involved in both phases of the project as primary investigator.

Lorentzen said she hopes this project will give a confident voice to women who have often felt the need to hide in the past.

"These women are so strong. They are so courageous," she said. "They have so much to proud of. What they've overcome is amazing."

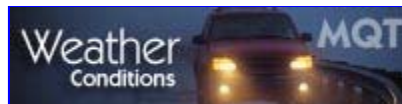
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Harbor House renovated



Harbor House domestic violence shelter in Marquette undergoes renovations. (Journal Photo by Kristen Kohrt)

By KRISTEN KOHRT, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — Services for women and children suffering from domestic violence will soon be enhanced when The Women's Center of Marquette moves into a new and soon-to-be-improved building.

In 2005, the center bought a new building on Baraga Avenue that will undergo renovations thanks to a \$100,000 loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The renovations were slated to begin right after the building was purchased, but due to zoning issues, architectural challenges and increased construction costs after Hurricane Katrina, the plans were postponed.

The latest loan comes in addition to a previous \$600,000 USDA loan in fiscal year 2005, as well as grants from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

Gail Nelson, executive director of the Women's Center, said the loans from the USDA were critical in completing the project. The renovations planned for the new building will increase the square footage, giving the center more space to house women in need of a temporary shelter.

"We will have an increased capacity to serve clients," she said. "It will also provide more privacy for clients."

The renovation will include construction of a barrier-free suite for those who are physically challenged and a playroom for children. More bathrooms will be added and the number of beds will be increased.

"We currently offer about 2,700 sheltered nights per year but, with these renovations, we will be able to offer 4,000 sheltered nights per year," Nelson said.



Workers from Ishpeming-based Advantage Professional Engineering and Construction pour cement for a new back entrance to the the future Harbor House, a shelter for women suffering from domestic violence. The new shelter is scheduled to open in spring. (Journal Photo by Kristen Kohrt)

Another improvement to the shelter is the location. Positioned across the street from the Marquette County Courthouse, Marquette County Sheriff's Department, Marquette Police Department and the local Department of Human Services, those who visit the shelter will have easy access to other resources that may help them move on to a better situation.

Congressman Bart Stupak (D – Menominee) praised the USDA for providing funding for this vital service.

"This project encountered some unforeseen difficulty and I am happy that the USDA was able to provide funds to see the project through," he said in a statement. "Victims of domestic violence need a place they can turn for help and the Women's Center provides that service for Marquette and Alger Counties."

Nelson said they hope to have the new Women's Center up and running by late spring.



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Published December 10, 2006

County to get plan for ending homelessness

By KURT MADDEN
Editor

EATON COUNTY — Chris was kicked out of her boyfriend's house and had no place to live.

She found an apartment she could afford but could not obtain money from the Department of Human Services for a security deposit because she was sleeping on a friend's couch and was not in a shelter.

When she was finally admitted to a shelter several days later, she learned that the landlord rented the apartment to someone else because so much time had passed.

Chris then left the shelter but discovered she could no longer sleep on her friend's couch.

These scenarios are played out repeatedly for people who live on the edge of poverty and suddenly find themselves without a roof over their head, according to a 13-page report that will be submitted to the Eaton County Board of Commissioners this Wednesday.

The report is part of an ambitious effort — called Housing First — to end homelessness within ten years, not only in Eaton County, but throughout the state, said Jonathan Greene, economic development and housing coordinator.

"First, community awareness is necessary to create community will," Greene said.

The report says that a shift in culture is needed: From accepting homelessness as something that will always exist to assuming permanent housing is a right for every person.

Greene said the challenge is daunting because of the unique issues often found among the homeless. Sometimes bad personal decisions are the main cause for homelessness.

"Some homeless people are tough to love," Greene said.

Key findings of the report are:

- Many of the homeless can't find jobs because of a lack of education or a criminal history; the average homeless person has a tenth grade education and 10 percent of those have a felony on their record.
- In three Eaton County communities, 51 percent or more of the population is considered low income.
- The SIREN/Eaton Shelter provided 8,000 emergency overnight stays from Dec. 1,

2004 to Nov. 30, 2005.

- Educational attainment has little to do with homelessness; people with some college education represent the highest percentage of people without homes in the county.
- Eviction by landlord, having a low-paying job or having a low income, and domestic violence represent 68 percent the primary causes for homelessness.

A key meeting in July involving 44 people representing service agencies, local governments, school districts, the courts and businesses shows there is substantial interest in finding ways to end homelessness, Greene said.

The report calls for developing a centralized information and referral service, creating transportation and creating incentives for landlords to make housing available to people they otherwise may reluctant to have as a tenant.

Greene said he will present the report to the board, but does not expect any action next Wednesday.

The next step in the effort in Eaton County is to determine a baseline for homelessness and the availability of affordable housing. The county completed a report four years ago that said there was not enough housing for the elderly and for the poor.

Launched in March this year, the initiative is part of a statewide plan involving the state Department of Human Service and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

A \$10,000 grant was made available from the state to 83 counties to begin an effort to create community awareness, Greene said.

In October 650 people from across the state gathered at the first annual Michigan Homeless Summit for a two-day event at the Lansing Center.

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TENANTS OUT IN COLD: Fire takes everything

Displaced residents bond, stick together

BY CECIL ANGEL
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

December 9, 2006

They seemed like mother and daughter, or perhaps sisters or best girlfriends in the protective way Teresa Garrison ran interference for Towana Jarrell.

Jarrell was having a hard time Friday.

An early morning fire Thursday at the Parkview Manor Apartments on Detroit's west side had left her and her two sons -- along with dozens of other people -- with just the clothes on their backs. The family had lived in a one-bedroom, fourth-floor apartment for only four days.

The fire, which is still under investigation, killed Margeaux Bentley, 29, a medical technician and mother of two, and injured two other tenants. Jarrell, 33, and her two children escaped unharmed -- at least physically.

By Friday afternoon, she was in the rental office in the Elmira Apartments the day after a free night at a Red Roof Inn in Southfield -- courtesy of the American Red Cross Southeastern Michigan Chapter -- trying to recover some semblance of normalcy for her family.

The management company for Parkview Manor, Keystone Management Group in Mt. Pleasant, was providing displaced tenants with an opportunity to rent at its other properties.

Elmira Apartments is on a stretch of Tireman Avenue, between Burt Road and Trinity Street, across from Rouge Park and with a clear view of the burned-out Parkview Manor at 7800 Pierson Street. Jarrell was there because she had no place for her family to spend the night.

She was told nothing was immediately available at Elmira and was asked if she would consider another location.

Garrison, who was able to get a unit in the Elmira building, quickly stepped in.

"Her son goes to a special school, and they pick him up over here," she said.

Until the three-alarm fire destroyed the 80-unit, four-story Parkview Manor apartment building, it had been home to the Jarrell family, Garrison and 60 to 70 other households who also were searching for places to stay Friday. Garrison and Jarrell never even knew each other until the fire.

Since then, Garrison said a bond formed quickly among many of the former tenants of Parkview Manor.

Garrison, 57, a social worker, took the Jarrell family under her wing because she knew she was needed.

Garrison said her job is "making sure she's settled with her children."

Like Jarrell, Garrison lost everything in the fire.

"I woke up to smoke 10 after one," Garrison said of the fire that had been reported at 1:19 a.m. "I had been asleep for an hour. God woke up me."

Garrison saw smoke rolling across her second-floor apartment bedroom from the baseboards.

"It looked like a stream from a cigarette," she said. "It was growing."



Ice covers the remains of Parkview Manor Apartments in Detroit on Friday. Fire destroyed the 80-unit building, leaving many people homeless and one woman dead.

HELP FOR FIRE VICTIMS

For displaced Parkview Manor tenants needing assistance, the Salvation Army is offering two truckloads of clothing, blankets, furniture and other necessities.

Tenants can pick them up at Denby Children's Center, 20775 Pembroke, between Lahser and Evergreen, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. today and Monday.

Tenants needing apartments may call Keystone Management at 313-272-6447 until 5:30 p.m. Voicemail will be checked periodically after hours.

She looked out her bedroom window but didn't see a fire truck. She looked out into the hallway and found it filled with smoke. Garrison said she slipped a black dress over her nightgown, put on boots and a coat and headed out of the building.

"We all fully expected to go back in and get all of our things," she said.

As she told her story, another fire survivor exited the Elmira office.

Christina Williams, 19, was devastated. She had been proud of her accomplishments.

In June, she had graduated from Cody High School in Detroit and had been living in her first apartment with her 6-month-old infant daughter, A'nylah Thompson, for 2 1/2 months. Williams had furnished her one-bedroom apartment and had begun to decorate it for Christmas.

"I busted my ass," she wept. "Everything we have is gone. I don't even have my own damn diploma."

Nearby, Jarrell's sons, Mario, 12, and Marcel, 9, played on the lawn of the Elmira Apartments. Inside, their mother gathered donated clothes for them.

Jarrell said she was pleased with the outpouring of public support. Strangers called the Red Roof Inn while she was there, offering free clothing and shelter.

Until her apartment at Elmira is ready Monday, Jarrell and her sons will stay with Garrison in her unfurnished unit.

"We came out of it with our lives, and as long as we have life, we can start over," Garrison said.

Contact **CECIL ANGEL** at 313-223-4531 or angel@freepress.com.

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Article published Dec 10, 2006

More than 100 Shop with a Cop for Christmas

By Lon Medd

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Over the past two weekends, the Livingston County Sheriff's Department's Shop With a Cop program took more than 100 children to Wal-Mart in Genoa Township to shop for Christmas presents.

In its fourth year, the Shop With a Cop program pairs police officers with underprivileged children in the community.

"We try to help give them a good Christmas," said Sheriff Bob Bezotte. "This brightens their day."

Officers and employees with the Sheriff's Department as well as the Michigan State Police's Brighton post, and the Fowlerville, Hamburg Township, Pinckney, Unadilla Township, Howell, Brighton and Green Oak Township police departments as well as the Metroparks Police Department worked in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Human Services and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Livingston County to identify children to participate in this year's program.

Community sponsors give children 5-16 years old \$125 each to spend. The main sponsors for Shop With a Cop were Wal-Mart and Pepsi, which contributed money to spend.

The morning begins with children meeting at the state Department of Human Services' Livingston County offices in Genoa Township, where they are escorted to Wal-Mart in police cruisers with lights flashing and sirens blaring.

"It was kind of neat to see their responses," Bezotte said. "I think they like riding in the police car just as much as they do shopping."

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lon Medd at (517) 552-2847 or at Imedd@gannett.com.



Warming the children

Sunday, December 10, 2006

Michigan's first wave of winter cold has struck in recent days, and with it the annual Warm the Children appeal has gathered steam. This year more than 1,300 children signed up, and \$83 vouchers have been issued for 1,000 of them.

That is good news. Nearly 200 more children have been served than last year. While contributions are doing well, it is important that they continue -- both to pay for this year's children and to provide the start-up funds for next year's effort.

Warm the Children is a triple partnership between the Community Action Agency, the Jackson Junior Welfare League and the Citizen Patriot. It is simple in concept -- bring in enough contributions to fund \$83 worth of cold-weather clothing for each child, the money actually being spent at Meijer stores with volunteer shopper-escorts. Our business office handles the accounting, so the program overhead is nil. In other words, a dollar donated to the kids is a dollar spent on the kids.

There are many needs in Jackson this season. As you give to charitable efforts that address these various needs, don't forget the children. They need to be warm in a Michigan winter.

To offer your services as a volunteer shopper, call 768-4839 and leave your name and contact information. To make monetary donations, drop off or mail them to "Warm the Children," in care of the Jackson Citizen Patriot, 214 S. Jackson, Jackson MI 49201. There is a coupon on Page 2 of each day's paper to make it easy for donors. Thank you for your support, now and in the future.

--Jackson Citizen Patriot

Monday: Police statements and legislative protection

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IN OUR OPINION: Legislators draw a harsh welfare line

December 11, 2006

Gov. Jennifer Granholm needs to veto the Legislature's latest bid to put lifetime limits on welfare benefits and not let that Republican-led effort become part of some last-minute deal-making in this, presumably the last week of Lansing's lame-duck session.

As it is, most of her priorities, and many of theirs, have apparently fallen by the wayside, which should give her the latitude she needs to dodge bad deals.

Michigan's economy is just too rocky to assume that a four-year limit over a lifetime is reasonable even for able-bodied parents. It's not hard to imagine a family needing help when their kids are toddlers and then perhaps again a decade later. As Department of Human Services training programs continue to expand, the odds improve that fewer parents will cycle through again. But no program has a 100% guarantee.

And some people will never get past their personal hurdles, be it a learning disability, chronic mental illness or addiction. No one can write enough exceptions to ensure their children are protected. Caseworkers should make individual judgments about how to proceed in these sad instances, without having their hands tied by laws that can't foresee every human problem.

A state cannot improve its long-term prospects by putting more of its poorest children at risk. As she promised during her re-election campaign, Granholm has to stand firmly behind them.

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State Legislative Leaders Ponder \$46.9 Million In '06 Overspending

MIRS, Friday, December 8, 2006

State Budget Directory Mary **LANNNOYE** recently informed the chairs of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees that three departments had overspent their General Fund budgets for last fiscal year by a combined \$46.9 million — a hole the administration wants filled before lawmakers leave next week.

"Although book-closing activities for fiscal year 2006 are not yet complete, it is not apparent that, when final expenditures and revenues have been booked, three agencies will have net General Fund over-expenditures for the year: the Departments of Corrections, Human Services and State Police," wrote Lannoye.

Lannoye wrote that the state budget office is working to determine what resources may be available to address any fiscal year 2006 supplemental needs. "Each agency has also been charged with developing a corrective action plan to insure that the situation does not recur in fiscal year 2007," wrote Lannoye.

Apparently, the Department of State Police overspent its budget by just over \$3 million. The Department of Corrections overspent its budget by some \$13.9 million and the Department of Human Services over spent its budget by \$30.7 million.

According to Gary **OLSON**, director of the Senate Fiscal Agency, the state in the 1980s used to struggle with departmental over-expenditures, but over the past decade and a half had seemed to put the problem aside. However, he noted, it's popping up again.

This week, Lannoye sent a formal request to the Legislature seeking to fund the over-expenditures in the form of a supplemental. Such a supplemental would essentially wipe the over-expenditures off of the books.

"We would absolutely like them to take up this supplemental by the end of the year," said Greg **BIRD**, spokesman for the State Budget Office. "If we don't, we could end up with vendors not getting paid and those departments closing in the red."

Bird said the state usually closes its books by mid to late December and the over-expenditures must be "funded" through a supplemental before book closing can occur. While book closing could be delayed, or departments closed in the red, neither one are desirable outcomes said Bird.

The following is a department-by-department explanation of how the overspending came about.

Department of Corrections

The Department of Corrections (DOC) overspent because of increased spending pressures from six areas. The Department has \$19 million in health care costs that were not anticipated. Overtime costs came in at \$18 million over budget. Fuel and utility cost for the state's prisons were \$9.1 million higher than anticipated.

Additional beds cost \$6.1 million, and increased costs at prisoner intake centers cost \$1.89 million more than expected and spending by the County Jail Services Unit was \$474,000 over budget.

Combined, that represents \$54.6 million in overspending. However, through Department-wide cost-savings measures, the agency was able to put away \$30.6 million. A supplemental appropriation of \$10 million has already been approved by lawmakers reducing the overall spending problem to \$13.9 million.

Department of Human Services

The spending pressure for Human Services (DHS) comes primarily from three areas.

- FIP caseloads are higher than budgeted. The consensus agreement between the Administration and the House and Senate Fiscal Agencies on May 31, 2006, budgeted for an average annual caseload of 78,450 cases but the actual average was 80,360 cases.

- Revenues from retained child support and public assistance recoupments were lower than budgeted

- Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant expenditures were higher than anticipated. The budget assumed expenditures at 97 percent of the appropriation. Actual expenditures were 99 percent of TANF expenditures over the federal TANF block grant amount pushed the costs to the general fund.

Department of State Police

The over-expenditure at the Michigan State Police (MSP) is attributable to a number of factors, including a "failure to realize administrative cost reductions included in the original enacted budget, unfunded state employee economic costs, restricted revenue shortfalls, and inter-agency charges in excess of the amounts included in the enacted budget."

County budget proposal: \$11.86M

Includes plan to help adults in welfare families

[Jan Bellamy](#), Staff Writer
517.437.6016

Hillsdale County's Board of Commissioners took a hard line during budget 2007 discussions Friday. But they bent a bit in light of a real hard—luck story.

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“Federal funding is being reduced we learned today, and we're here to ask the county for another \$10,000 for a program that helps put to work adult members of welfare families,” said Shawn Culp, director of the local office of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The request came on the heels of commissioners denying numerous worthy requests to assemble a balanced budget of \$11,862,253 for 2007. The budget must be finalized and a hearing held by Dec. 21 so it can be adopted before the end of the year.

Culp explained the county has traditionally supported the WorkFirst program with \$16,000 or 25 percent of a full—time employee's annual salary. The increase request came as a result of a change in how the federal govern—ment will assist in funding what are known as “local revenue agreements.” These cooperative contracts involve more than one agency and more than one level of government.

Culp said the return on the county's investment will be seen in two ways:

n The additional money in the county helps clients pay for things that help them continuing working (clothes, car repairs, etc.).

n Higher numbers of people working rather than simply taking cash assistance, as compared with other counties.

“You can count only eight people eligible in Hillsdale County but not participating in WorkFirst, while Branch County's number (is) 48,” Culp said.

At any point in time, 70 to 80 people are eligible in Hillsdale County, said Joyce Hula, program supervisor.

Commissioner Andy Weldon, finance committee head, acknowledged the county could not grant Culp's request if it meant adding an expenditure into the budget, so he made another suggestion.

“How about we move \$10,000 from the child—care category into the column for DHS general support?” asked Weldon.

Culp said that would work. In the meantime, the DHS staff will pursue additional funding sources to guard against future surprises.

After all, the contingency fund currently being considered by the county's board of commissioners amounts to only \$140,000.

“That amount is necessary,” said Maxine Vanlerberg, chairman, “to deal with unexplained emergencies and potential employee contract changes as we negotiate with the SEIU (Service Employees International Union).”

Highest and lowest from the proposed budget:

n Highest: \$1,701,128. Sheriff's Department budget reflects completed union negotiations and no raises taken by top administrators.

n Second highest: Employee health insurance payouts of \$1,695,000, representing 14.3 percent of the budget and an increase of 10 percent over last year.

n Lowest: \$0 for gypsy moth control.

n Next lowest: \$2,000 for either law books and equipment or for miscellaneous expenses.

The proposed budget includes no provisions for staff increases. Department heads were given minimal amounts with which to work in purchasing equipment.

"You have only so much money," said Vanlerberg to those attending the budget review session. "You have to make some tough choices."

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GOVERNOR

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MARIANNE UDOW
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News Release

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**Michigan Department of Human Services Summarily Suspends
the Adult Foster Care Family Home License Number AF690086103 of Phyllis Roberts,
Roberts Gentle Care AFC Home**

December 11, 2006

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing (OCAL) issued an order of summary suspension and notice of intent to revoke the license of Otsego County adult foster care family home provider Phyllis Roberts, Roberts Gentle Care AFC Home, 7607 Hayes Tower Road, Gaylord, Michigan. This action resulted from a recent investigation of a complaint of the adult foster care family home.

The December 6, 2006, complaint investigation found several violations of the Adult Foster Care Facility Licensing Act and/or adult foster care family home rules regarding licensee suitability, restricting the movement of a resident by binding or tying, resident nutrition and rules regarding the altering, administration and storage of resident medication. OCAL took "emergency action" under the Michigan Administrative Procedures Act, MCL 24.292(2) to protect the health, welfare, and safety of the adults in residence.

Effective 9:00 a.m., December 9, 2006, the Summary Suspension Order prohibits Phyllis Roberts from operating an adult foster care family home at 7607 Hayes Tower Road, Gaylord, Michigan. Accordingly, she may not accept physically handicapped, developmentally disabled, mentally ill and aged adults for care after that date and time. The order also requires Ms. Roberts to inform all of the guardians of adults in her care that her license has been suspended and that she can no longer provide adult foster care.

Ms. Roberts has held a license to operate an adult foster care family home since October 27, 1999. The license was for six adults.

Michigan law defines an adult foster care family home as “a private residence with the approved capacity to receive 6 or fewer adults to be provided with foster care for 5 or more days a week and for 2 or more consecutive weeks. The adult foster care family home licensee shall be a member of the household, and an occupant of the residence.”

For more information, consult DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhslicensing